

A tell-all you wish would just shut up

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'You know, I think the whole syphilis thing just really did me in.'

This is Maureen McCormick talking to *Today's* Meredith Vieira last week, in the middle of promoting her horrifying new memoir, *Here's The Story: Surviving Marcia Brady and Finding My True Voice*.

McCormick played the sylph-like, shiny-haired meta-teen for five years (from 1969 to 1974). She has not performed as the - to her - torturously perfect girl for 34 years. Yet this woman was apparently haunted her entire life until she found Prozac and Christ (or rather, Christ found her: In the book, His appearance plays out like a felonious assault), and, naturally, lost a lot of weight on *Celebrity Fit Club*.

Splashed across almost every current magazine is news of the "Brady Bunch Bombshell," a book that makes so many vulgar and appalling confessions it is less a celebrity tell-all than the obscene confessions that constitute Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*.

The catalogue of her disquieting life experiences is long and includes paranoia, depression, cocaine addiction, attempted suicide, prostitution, multiple abortions and her personal conviction that she, like her mother and grandmother, had syphilis and would die in an asylum because of it.

Other admissions include pornographic details of her relationship with her TV brother, Barry Williams; her misguided crush on her TV father, Bob Reed; and her envy of Eve Plumb's (who played Jan) "boobs." Of Plumb, she also observes that she "farted all the time," and walked around naked on the set; and further expresses regret that she confided a lesbian moment with Plumb on a syndicated radio show, because it was all a "joke." Additionally, and pathetically, she recounts a date with Steve Martin that went poorly because she "didn't laugh at his jokes."

This last bit almost makes the desperate 52-year-old likeable, but the rest of the mess is evidence that celebrity autobiographies have gone too far.

In his essay about confession, *Crying*, critic Laurence Lerner compares good and bad confessional writing, and notes that the latter is simply "busy remembering": that it is artless, and "the psychological lingua franca of modern self-observation," filled with cliché and lacking in originality or purpose.

While it is not a cliché by any means to emerge from a syphilis-mad family in order to play a cartoonish teen while hearing voices that may be quieted only by cocaine, there is a larger cliché at large in the latest Brady scandal. (There's been no shortage of them: Recently, Susan Olsen, who played Cindy, showed up on a morning radio show reeking of alcohol and left in mid-conversation to vomit; Florence Henderson is publicly fighting with Chris Knight, and so on.)

And this cliché has to do with the Marcia Brady v. the "True Voice" business in the book's subtitle. How delusional must someone be to believe that this slight role had the puissance, the substance to squash a living person's voice for decades?

Marcia Brady was perfect, as McCormick moans repeatedly. That is, the character was perfect in the manner of one of Andy Warhol's soup-can paintings, which is to say mimetic and garishly pop.

The Brady Bunch appeared when America was in the grip of a terrible war and unprecedented civilian protest (both against the war and for civil rights and women's and gay rights). The *Bunch* characters were an antidote to the world around them, and no one sentient ever believed them to reflect actual people of this era (any more than the 1950s of the Cunninghams of *Happy Days* rang true to a 1970s audience, still familiar with the unhappy days of the Cold War).

When the *Brady Bunch* films were made in the 1990s, they were not meant to parody the show as evidence of a saccharine culture: They were meant to cement the absurdities already inherent in a show where for all the significance given to it, Vietnam might well have been some arcane loin that Sam the Butcher might be selling Alice for dinner.

And why is it that only failed stars claim to be bedevilled by roles they played so long ago?

Have you ever heard Al Pacino comment, "All my life, I felt people wanted me to be cool, like Michael Corleone. And it led me to believe that I had gonorrhea." Or, for that matter, has someone like Mary Tyler Moore, whose life is a catalogue of (more organic) heartbreaks, ever complained piteously that she is not Mary Richards as a means of justifying a crystal meth habit?

Lerner's construction of "modern self-observation" is accurate: It is not enough and it is not interesting to, like little Cindy, vomit one's misdeeds, in service of a calculated bid for a collective blessing.

And even if this book's nastiness is partly derived from some publisher's strategy about "a good hook," McCormick is vile for telling the world such things and, in doing so, shows the parlous lack of sense and boundaries she exhibited while trading sex for drugs with a Hollywood cocaine dealer.

What is next? Titles like *To Urkel and Partway Back?* Or *Remembrance of Chachi Things Past?*

McCormick looked so happy and poised on *Today*. Radiantly pretty in spite of an ill-disguised turkey neck, she seemed to be descending a staircase, eyes blazing with memories, ready to admit to any number of trifling self-homicides and ready, at last, for her close-up.

